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ABSTRACT

Due to altering student and university needs, orientation librarians must now endeavor to innovate and change in order to effectively train students to use the library. A more professional image (currently lacking among many librarians), greater faculty and administration usage, and the utilization of the "outreach concept" will all contribute toward a more professional educational service. (DS)

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LIBRARY ORIENTATION -- WHAT'S THAT?

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Mention, if you will, "library orientation" to the average professor, and there will appear a quizzical look on his or her face. It is not unlikely that this amazement will be followed by a question to satisfy his or her mind as to what is meant by "library orientation."

The problem rests in the fact that the answer depends largely upon who is answering the question. It almost always grows out of both training and experience of the person queried. The real answer lies in the philosophy or degree of commitment of the librarian to being an educator. When we say that a librarian is an educator, what do we mean? What does an educator do? How do we define an educator? Is this term to be compared with our usage of "statesman" — a person who has reached the highest respect and admiration in politics? Do we continue to refer to teachers, to deans, to professors, to librarians, while holding the title "educator" in abeyance until it is time to provide a summation of years of work and an evaluation of a lifetime in which there has been significant contributions to the advancement of the profession? Can we think of the educator as one who accrued a broad spectrum of interests in learning, and who has contributed significantly to human advancement by enlarging upon man's ability to deal with universal problems?

My own summation of the professional lives of many persons in the world of library science is often briefly given as "he is an educator." I like to think

that I am reserving this title as one of honor, indicating that the individual to whom I am referring has not limited himself or herself to just the professional aspects of librarianship, but has been committed to all the intellectual involvements of the field of education. So when I refer to library orientation I am first of all thinking of our roles as teachers, as instructors, as persons helping to shape the intellectual growth patterns of numerous students with whom we come in contact. Library orientation, in the simplest terms, is the teaching of students to use the resources of information and learning. In theory, at least, the resultant product is a person who has learned to rely on his general knowledge of such resources so that he may continue learning for the entire span of life, possibly using this information for the further development of mankind. It is an aspect of library science which concentrates upon teaching, emphasizing the integration of facts learned in many ways to the solution of current problems, whether they be practical or intellectual.

If we assume that any person with the necessary fortitude, mental ability, and motivation can finish college, receive a masters degree in library science, can then have the capabilities of being an educator, we are mostly right. There does creep into the picture other measures which either relegate the individual to mediocrity in the profession, or destines him or her to increasingly important roles within the library world. First, there are those who opt by their own choice, to seek security and become reasonably satisfied in a comfortable situation. I see no wrong in this as long as the decision is made in all honesty. There are all kinds of personal and human needs which may make such a

selection an honest goal. Second, some librarians seek distinction and growth from the vantage point of a secure job, though continued personal and professional growth is a part of their objectives. Through an awareness of the entire library field they bring continuous improvement and a high level of competence to the position they elect to keep. The third group is mobile. Individuals in that group seek to move from one location to another, improving themselves as they move. Their reasons for moving may vary, but each new experience enlarges the parameters of their experience as they take with them all of their previously acquired knowledge and skills. They enjoy a change of scenery ever so often and are even attempting to better themselves.

The librarian who chooses to sharpen his or her skills in what we call orientation may safely fit into either group. He may be stationary or mobile. Only one group, the first, is hardly the type to make good orientation librarians. With the rapid changes in student needs and aspirations, and the efforts of colleges and universities to meet new societal demands, it is an inherent and built-in necessity that orientation librarians constantly innovate and change. To fail to recognize the importance of continued growth and development means failure as an orientation librarian.

There are problems always present in orientation which make the work interesting. The greatest, perhaps, is how to effectively teach the largest number of students to properly use library resources. The answer has to be concommitant with the mission of the college and university, the kind of students it attracts, and the extent of commitment of the entire educational community

to the needs and aspirations of its students. The greatest achievement of such goals can only happen when there is a respect among administration and teaching faculty for the contributions librarians and resources make to the educational objectives of the institution.

The administration of any college or university has the responsibility of maintaining an environment which fosters and enhances learning. There is no agency or department on any campus which plays a larger role in this respect than the library. The professor holds class two or three times a week for one hour each time. For the other hours, the student is left on his or her own. Dependent upon the student's attitude about the learning process, much of his remaining time should be among the learning resources. The librarian has the responsibility of making this a pleasant experience. Sometimes there is opportunity to provide excitement to learning by helping students discover something previously unknown. To the less serious student, it is often the librarian who teaches him or her to conserve effort by using the right index, or checking the proper catalog entry. The perturbing assignment becomes clearer when assistance is provided by the librarian.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing the library profession as we end the third quarter of this century is that of image. We often recognize this problem as one which directly affects public libraries, but it is just as prevalent on college campuses. A large number of students regard librarians as a little higher than the clerk-typist. This image is also prevalent among faculty members,

professionals, and administrators alike. Unfortunately, many librarians seem satisfied with this less than professional image - at least they do little to change it.

Administrators are not always the best library users. They become so involved in routine matters that they have little time left for visiting and using libraries. There are those who take time out on occasion to visit and seek materials for a speech, or to provide specific answers to a problem. But their general usage of library resources is poor in most instances. Librarians have too often accepted this fact, and operate under anticipated philosophies that the "materials are there; let them come and get it."

I propose that the outreach concept be applied to this group particularly. It is not idfficult to determine the major interests of this relatively small group. Individualized notes which call attention to new books and periodical articles meeting those interests are much more professional than many of the little tasks or "busy work" with which librarians are too often occupied. In most instances, the free copying of articles for very busy administrators would pay off in the long run. There will often be chapters or speeches included in annuals or conference proceedings which should be called to the attention of such people, helping them to be appreciative of the alertness of their librarians. When budget time comes this may mean the difference between more or less dollars, both in salaries and in acquisitions.

Faculties are notoriously ignorant of library resources, particularly of items outside of their normal classification. Many of them are only familiar

with the simplest of library procedures, but hesitate to seek help because they think this would reveal their ignorance. Others really think they know enough to find all of the materials they need. Actually, few faculty have developed the expertise necessary to ferret out all related materials in a research library. There is one thing that might be said of librarians which rings true. We have created such a system of classifying books that it even baffles us sometimes. I am often amused by catalogers who have difficulty locating materials in which they played a part in "secreting" into the collection.

Faculties can also be served in a better manner on many campuses. Of course that will take a little thought and imagination, but it will not be accomplished by continuing to be occupied with pseudo professional jobs which keep librarians too busy to look after the really important matters. After all, a faculty member who is served well will be the best ambassador for the advancement of the library profession and the improvement of the librarian's image on campus.

It is not only the freshman student who needs orienting to the library and its resources. Let us not forget the not so adroit faculty, staff, and administrators.

For these activities, however, we must learn professionalism. We need to keep reminding ourselves daily that our public sees an entire profession through the librarians they know. We need to keep promoting ourselves as educators who perform a function on campus at least as important to the program and mission as those who meet classes 9 or 12 hours per week. Orientation

librarianship offers a good opportunity to bring a new avenue of the profession which can provide an impetus to the entire staff to do what they are trained to do - provide people with information. It is good to orient students students to library usage. But students should be able to seek assistance from any librarian. So the philosophy of complete service must be shared by all of those who are responsible for any phase of library work.

In conclusion, our professional image has suffered from a lack of professionalism. Too much time is spent following in the wake of others who make the waves. In each library there must be a well-understood mission, a working philosophy. A part of that mission must be to provide a professional service worthy of being called that. With such an image, our colleagues will come to recognize our importance and will understand our roles in the educational arena. No longer will there be a need to provide answers to "What does an orientation librarian do?" They will know that it is merely an extension of an important phase of the work of all librarians in rounding out the training of students to enable them to make their marks in the world of learning.

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